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# Leadership in Forestry

By

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**L**EADERSHIP in forestry has passed through several eras, usually dominated by an individual or group of men who have been successful in having their ideas and objectives recognized. There are both positive and negative leaders—those who foster and promote and those who oppose. It is from the crucible of these competing elements that history selects those whose successes and failures are to be recorded. The different eras of leadership do not stand out in sharp relief. As each period has advanced there is a blending and mixing with the succeeding leaders who have, in turn, picked up the reins of progress.

As William B. Greeley points out in his book "Forests and Men," "not long after the war between the states a ground swell of education and public opinion set in . . . and it made the people ready to follow brilliant leaders who came to the front at the turn of the century." These leaders came from all walks of life—laymen, professional foresters, teachers, lumbermen and politicians. A few of those who stand out in history are Dr. Bernard E. Fernow, the first general secretary to The American Forestry Association; Franklin Hough, Uncle Sam's first forester, with an appropriation of \$200,000; President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot accomplished the most in the least time with their driving crusades and dramatic leadership in transferring millions of acres of Public Domain to Forest Reserves. There was Henry S. Graves, less dynamic but a capable leader, and Dr. C. A. Schenck who established the first school of forestry at Cornell University and on the Vanderbilt estate in North Carolina. Senator Charles L. McNary authored the Clark-McNary Act in 1924 which established the pattern of federal-state cooperative programs in forest protection and reforestation. In 1928 he joined in the McNary-McSweeney Act which set up a permanent plan of forest research. Industry has had its Long's and Weyerhaeuser's who have combined the science of forestry with the manufacture of forest products.

These are but a few of our early leaders in forestry. Every forest region and state have had men who contributed to both national and local progress in for-

estry. In most instances advancement has resulted not from the leadership of a single man but of many men working together toward a common goal. Frequently, leadership evolves because some catalytic issue compels groups to join forces in support or opposition. Often it is during these difficult periods that leaders are found or created.

So far, I have mentioned a few of the outstanding men in the field of national programs. They are some of the heroes whom history records. But with few exceptions history might have passed them by had they not enjoyed the support and had the help and loyalty of those working with and for them. The unrecorded and unsung heroes down through the ranks who carry out and implement into action the dreams of objectives of their leaders must also be recognized.

The ranger who translates programs and regulations into successful on-the-ground operations must have qualities of leadership. The logging boss who stimulates the fallers and cat-skinners into "practicing better forest practices and the manager who secures creative thinking from his subordinates in improved techniques and methods are leaders in their own right.

Every level or unit of an organization has its leader—at least in name and assignment. There is, of course, a wide range in the quality; different organizations may require different kinds of leadership and similar jobs in different locations may well require different approaches through different personalities. This does not mean that some do not think of leadership as a constant thing, place to place. It does mean, however, that we recognize the many variables and characteristics to be considered in looking realistically at our problems of organization leadership.

Some students of the subject divide leadership into three types: authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. Leadership which rests entirely in the leader is authoritarian, or leader-centered; leadership which is shared by the leader and group is democratic leadership, and that which is dispersed to individual group members is laissez-faire. We have seen all three in action, and each has its time and place. Under ordi-

nary conditions the democratic type seems to produce the best effect, however, it requires the greatest skills in human relations. It requires confidence, loyalty, imagination, understanding and clear lines of communication.

I have not yet found a satisfactory definition of the word "leadership." It is something we can recognize and often feel or sense. It may or may not express itself in strong positive terms or emotions. Since it manifests itself in such a variety of ways it is extremely elusive even though ever apparent.

Some say leaders are born while others claim they are made. I am sure that most recognized leaders have certain native or inherent qualities which under proper environment and under certain conditions their abilities are recognized, and they are placed in a position of exercising leadership. To some it seems to come more naturally than others. Teddy Roosevelt once said that he placed himself in front of opportunity.

Be that as it may, research has endeavored to describe some of the personality characteristics common to all leaders. In a report in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the following factors, which they call "personality variables," are the basic elements used: adjustment, extroversion, intelligence, determination, assertiveness, social maturity, lack of neuroticism, conventionality, attentiveness, orderliness, adaptability and energetic. I am sure there are many others and that they evidence themselves in many ways. According to William B. Greeley, one of Gifford Pinchot's finest qualities was his "ability to understand and work with men." I am inclined to believe that this simple statement puts many of the "personality variables" into an effective capsule form.

Forestry in America is young. In 1958 we celebrated a half-century of progress in conservation. With the courage and resourcefulness of our people, this nation, in less than two hundred years, has become rich and strong on the abundance of our natural resources. We have drawn heavily upon our bank account of soil, water, forests, minerals and forage.

During the past fifty years great progress has been made in each of these resource fields because of many outstanding leaders — both great and small.

What of the next fifty years? What will be our national resource wealth by the year 2010? What will be our status among nations? Will we have or have not a nation? Can we meet the problems of exploding population and sprawling metropolitanism? Can we develop and maintain an adequate supply of basic raw materials to support our standard of living? Will we still have enough open space for recreational purposes? How about the freedoms we enjoy today because we live in a land of plenty?

Those are some of the questions confronting the leaders of today as they endeavor to chart the course for tomorrow. Foresters have a responsibility to provide leadership in helping meet many of these issues.



## About the Author

DeWitt Nelson graduated from Iowa State College in 1925 with a B. S. degree in forestry. He was a member of Alpha Zeta, Phi Kappa Phi and Delta Upsilon fraternities. From 1925 to 1944 he served with the U. S. Forest Service as scaler, ranger, assistant supervisor and forest supervisor in the California region. During 1935-36 he was Civilian Conservation Corps Liaison Officer for the Ninth Corps Area.

In 1944 he accepted an appointment as Deputy Director of the California Department of Natural Resources. In 1945 he became State Forester of California. In 1953 he was appointed Director of the Department of Natural Resources. In 1959 he was reappointed to that position by Governor Brown.

DeWitt Nelson is Immediate Past President of the Society of American Foresters, Director of The American Forestry Association, past President of the Association of State Foresters, and also a member of the United States Department of Agriculture Soil and Water Conservation Advisory Committee. He is Chairman of the California Public Outdoor Recreation Plan Committee and Vice Chairman of the California Water Pollution Control Board.

The Swedish Royal Academy of Science awarded Mr. Nelson the Greater Linneus Medal in 1953.

There is a much greater awareness of these problems by the people today than there has ever been before, but that awareness must be translated into realistic and practical solutions if we are to continue to prosper and be a strong nation.

We are now at a critical point in our history — exploding population and growing demands for land, water, timber, minerals, forage and space are upon us — either we replenish, develop and husband our basic resources or the wealth and strength of our nation will dwindle.

The leaders of yesterday have given the leaders of tomorrow a base from which to operate. The forestry graduating classes of 1959 have a responsibility and a date with destiny. May they be as strong or stronger than their predecessors.